
AP[®] World History: Modern

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

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Long Essay Question 3

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Question 3: Long Essay Question, Economic Rivalries and Imperialism

6 points

General Scoring Notes

- Except where otherwise noted, each point of these rubrics is earned independently; for example, a student could earn a point for evidence without earning a point for thesis/claim.
- **Accuracy:** The components of these rubrics require that students demonstrate historically defensible content knowledge. Given the timed nature of the exam, essays may contain errors that do not detract from their overall quality, as long as the historical content used to advance the argument is accurate.
- **Clarity:** Exam essays should be considered first drafts and thus may contain grammatical errors. Those errors will not be counted against a student unless they obscure the successful demonstration of the content knowledge, skills, and practices described below.

In the period circa 1450 to 1750, economic, political, and religious rivalries led many imperial states around the world to expand their territories and influence.

Develop an argument that evaluates the extent to which economic rivalries were the primary motivation for the expansion of European empires during this period.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis/Claim (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to the prompt with a historically defensible thesis/claim that establishes a line of reasoning.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Are not historically defensible. - Only restate or rephrase the prompt. - Do not respond to the prompt. - Do not establish a line of reasoning. - Are overgeneralized.	Responses that earn this point: Provide a historically defensible thesis or claim about the extent to which economic rivalries were the primary motivation for the expansion of European empires during the period circa 1450 to 1750. The thesis or claim must either provide some indication of the reason for making that claim OR establish categories of the argument.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Provide a restatement of the prompt <i>“Economic rivalries were a major factor behind the expansion of European empires in the period circa 1450 to 1750.”</i> Provide a historically defensible claim, but do not establish a line of reasoning <i>“The Spaniards established a maritime empire after Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas.”</i> Provide a statement that is not historically defensible <i>“Europeans established large settler colonies in the Indian Ocean in the period circa 1450 to 1750.”</i>	Examples that earn this point: Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt <i>“Global exploration and imperial expansion in the period circa 1450 to 1750 was primarily motivated by economic rivalries because the empires competed over control of not only precious metals and other raw materials, but also labor and land resources.”</i> Establish a line of reasoning that evaluates the topic of the prompt with analytic categories <i>“Chartered and joint-stock companies were an important tool of European imperial expansion, because they combined the economic interests of private merchants and entrepreneurs and the political ambitions of rulers or governments—who often relied on the armies raised by such companies to carry out colonial expansion.”</i> Establish a line of reasoning <i>“European states colonized overseas territories in order to control more natural resources.”</i> [Minimally acceptable thesis/claim]
	Additional Notes: - The thesis or claim must consist of one or more sentences located in one place, either in the introduction or the conclusion (which may not be limited to the first or last paragraphs). - The thesis or claim must identify a relevant development(s) in the period, although it is not required to encompass the entire period.	

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row B Contextualization (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Describes a broader historical context relevant to the prompt.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: - Provide an overgeneralized statement about the time period referenced in the prompt. - Provide context that is not relevant to the prompt. - Provide a passing phrase or reference. Examples that do not earn this point: Do not provide context relevant to the topic of the prompt <i>“The Sunni-Sh’ia split within Islam was intensified by political rivalries between the Ottomans and the Safavids.”</i> Provides a passing phrase or reference <i>“Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492.”</i>	Responses that earn this point: - Accurately describe a context relevant to economic rivalries or imperial expansion during the period circa 1450 to 1750. Examples of relevant context that earn this point include the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided: - Age of Exploration sponsored by empires - Desire to find a short route to China and India - Mercantilism - Technological innovations in maritime navigation and transportation - Joint-stock companies - Empires conquering new territories - Empires fighting wars with one another over expansion and new territories - Desire to avoid Muslim controlled overland routes Example of acceptable contextualization: <i>“Portugal was a leader in the exploration of overseas territories and the establishment of the global trading-post empire.”</i> <i>“English and Dutch states rushed to find alternative routes to Asia.”</i> [Minimally acceptable contextualization]
	Additional Notes: - The response must describe broader historical events, developments, or processes that occur before, during, or continue after the time frame of the question that are relevant to the topic of the prompt. - To earn this point, the context provided must be more than a phrase or reference.	

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
Row C Evidence (0–2 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Provides specific examples of at least two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt.	2 points Supports an argument in response to the prompt using at least two pieces of specific and relevant evidence.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn points: - Identify a single piece of evidence. - Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic of the prompt. - Provide evidence that is outside the time period or region specified in the prompt. - Repeat information that is specified in the prompt. Examples that do not earn points: Provide evidence that is outside the time period <i>“Admiral Zheng He led Chinese diplomatic and reconnaissance voyages in the Indian Ocean, including to East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, India, and Southeast Asia.”</i>	Responses that earn 1 point: - Identify at least two specific historical examples relevant to economic rivalries or imperial expansion during the period circa 1450 to 1750. Examples of evidence that are specific and relevant include the following (two examples required): - Columbian exchange and new crops - Plantation economies - Transatlantic slave trade - Trading posts in Africa and Asia - Global flow of silver - Capitalism, including the ideas of Adam Smith - Mercantilism - The East India Companies - Battle of Lepanto - Omani traders in the Indian Ocean - Ming and Qing isolationist policies - Specific information about East India Company trading posts [factories], such as Dutch VOC centers in Java, or English centers in Madras, Bombay or Calcutta - Specific examples of key trading goods, such as silk from China, cotton cloth from India, or spices from Indonesia Example of a statement that earns one point for evidence: <i>“In the seventeenth century, the Dutch VOC repeatedly attacked Portuguese ships and territories in the Indian Ocean, seizing important colonial territories in Ceylon and the Spice Islands.”</i>	Responses that earn 2 points: - Use at least two specific historical examples to support an argument regarding how economic rivalries were the primary motivation for the expansion of European empires during the period circa 1450 to 1750. Examples that successfully support an argument with evidence: <i>“The discovery of silver in the Americas enabled Spain to establish a global trade in silver, stretching from Europe, through Spanish colonies in North and South America, and across the Pacific to Manila and East Asia. The silver trade changed the global economy as the Spanish and other Europeans were now able to greatly increase their trade with China.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about Spanish economic motives to expand in the Americas] <i>“Desire to control the cash crop economies in North America and to claim their share in the lucrative Asian trade led to rivalries and wars among the British, French, and the Dutch. Even wars that started within Europe, such as the War of the Spanish Succession and the Seven Years Wars spread overseas and were transformed into colonial wars.”</i> [Uses evidence to support an argument about economic rivalries between European powers leading to conflicts and wars]
	Additional Notes: - Typically, statements credited as evidence will be more specific than statements credited as contextualization. - If a response has a multipart argument, then it can meet the threshold of two pieces of evidence by giving one example for one part of the argument and another example for a different part of the argument, but the total number of examples must still be at least two.		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
Row D Analysis and Reasoning Complex Understanding	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Uses historical reasoning [e.g. comparison, causation, continuity and change] to frame or structure an argument that addresses the prompt.	2 points Demonstrates a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt through sophisticated argumentation and/or effective use of evidence.
(0–2 points)	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn points: - May include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument. - May assert the use of historical reasoning but does not use it to frame or structure an argument.	Responses that earn 1 point: Must demonstrate the use of historical reasoning to frame or structure an argument about the extent to which economic rivalries were the primary motivation for the expansion of European empires during the period circa 1450 to 1750. The reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking specificity.	Responses that earn 2 points: May demonstrate a complex understanding through sophisticated argumentation that is relevant to the prompt. This may be done in a variety of ways, such as: - Explaining multiple themes or perspectives to explore complexity or nuance; OR - Explaining multiple causes or effects, multiple similarities or differences, or multiple continuities or changes; OR - Explaining both cause and effect, both similarity and difference, or both continuity and change; OR - Explaining relevant and insightful connections within and across periods or geographical areas. These connections should clearly relate to an argument that responds to the prompt. May demonstrate a complex understanding through effective use of evidence relevant to an argument that addresses the prompt. This may be done in a variety of ways that might include: - Explaining how multiple pieces of specific and relevant evidence [at least four] support a nuanced or complex argument that responds to the prompt; OR - Using evidence effectively to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of different perspectives relevant to the prompt.

	Examples that do not earn points: Provide evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to an argument • <i>“The Spanish exported large amounts of silver from the Americas back to Europe during the 1600s.”</i>	Using a historical reasoning process to frame or structure an argument could include: • Explaining Ottoman efforts to oppose the expansion of Portuguese trade in the Indian Ocean to show the importance of economic competitiveness to Muslim land-based empires. • Explaining how the Dutch pursued their economic and political rivalry against the Portuguese by attacking and expelling the Portuguese from trading posts and settlements in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Example of acceptable use of historical reasoning: • <i>“Because Portugal was united with Spain and the Netherlands was involved in a war of independence from Spain, the Dutch VOC considered the Portuguese to be their enemies and attacked and expelled them from their trading posts in many parts of Asia.”</i> [Indicates a cause/effect related to European rivalries in Asia]	Demonstrating a complex understanding might include any of the following, if appropriate elaboration is provided: • Explaining how Europeans developed state-chartered, joint-stock companies through the use of new legal concepts [limited liability partnerships], financial instruments [stock exchanges, commercial insurance], and economic philosophies [mercantilism], and then used these new companies, including the English East India Company, the Dutch East India Company [VOC], and the French East India Company to build trading empires in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. Explaining that such trading empires could include both large territories with direct access to resources [such as the Dutch colonies in Sri Lanka, or the French colony in Haiti/Saint-Domingue] and small trading-post territories that secured access to the markets of large Asian states or empires [such as the Dutch colony in Nagasaki, Japan, or the British colonies in Surat and Bombay on the west coast of India]. [Explains how at least four pieces of evidence support a nuanced or complex argument] • Explaining that, while England, the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent, France, used commercial companies as vehicles of their imperial expansion, Spain and Portugal continued to rely on direct imperial control by governors and colonial officials appointed directly from Europe; also, explaining that due to the very strong connection between the Catholic Church and their governments, Spain and Portugal generally maintained strong support for spreading Christianity among their colonial populations, whereas England and the Netherlands remained largely focused on economic profit and did not generally get involved in religious matters in the colonial territories under their control. [Explains multiple similarities or differences] • Explaining how European trading companies in Asia established outposts on the coasts and focused primarily on trade, while Muslim land-based Empires like the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals established and maintained territorial empires whose wealth came primarily from taxation of agriculture. [Explains relevant and insightful connections between regions]
	Additional Notes: • To earn the first point for analysis and reasoning, the response must use historical reasoning to structure a response to the prompt, although the reasoning might be uneven or imbalanced, or the evidence may be overly general or lacking in specificity. • This complex understanding must be part of the argument and may be demonstrated in any part of the response. • While it is not necessary for this complex understanding to be woven throughout the response, it must be more than merely a phrase or reference.		

Previously, East Asian states, such as China, had the upperhand on resources and power. Europe had little resources that were desired by the dominant trading powers. Through events like the Crusades, Islamic and Chinese inventions had made their way through trade to Europe, giving them access to advanced navigation systems and ship building. Similar to these inventions, new ideals made their way to Europe as well, furthering a drive for expansion. While economic motives including new economic ideals as well as drive for domination over certain trade motivated the expansion of European empires, missionary values on the spread on religion also pushed for the European expansion from the period 1450 to 1750.

Economic rivalries played a huge role in European motivation for expansion. One of these rivalries sprung from the Indian Ocean Trade routes. European elites wanted access to spices, but the prices were outrageous after they reached Western Europe from South and South East Asia. The supply brought over was also minimal, so European states only were able to get so much of it. This created a drive for Europeans to make their way to the Indian Ocean and control trade themselves. Then, they could bring it back to Europe and sell it to make a profit. The Portuguese dominated this trade, and established a trading post empire, led by Prince Henry the Navigator and Vasco de Gama. However, the Dutch saw the wealth being accumulated by Portugal, and sought to take over this trade as well. This resulted in an economic rivalry for control of the Indian Ocean trade, in which the Dutch ended victorious due to new ships like the flyut. Also during this time period, the idea of mercantilism was spread throughout the world. Mercantilism refers to the idea that there is only so much wealth in the world, and the goal was to obtain the most wealth, similar to a pie. This created a global economic conflict regarding who was going to gain the most wealth in the world. European states wanted to spread their control over silver trade, which motivated their expansion.

However, not only economic motives drove European expansion during this period. The Protestant Reformation occurred during this period, which was a schism between the Catholics and Protestant Christians. Both religions wanted to expand their reach via missionary activity, creating a European motivation for expansion during this period that had no regard to the economy. As an example, Christian missionaries went into Japan, attempting to spread their religion to the East Asian state. But, this resulted unsuccessfully for Europeans, because Japan ended up closing themselves off and getting rid of any Christian missionaries. This did create a period of great peace for Tokugawa Japan. Overall, economic rivalries heavily motivated European expansion from 1450-1750, but these motivations were also accompanied by religious desires as well.

During the time period 1450 to 1750, many European states like Spain were exploring different continents and setting up colonies in places like Africa and the Western hemisphere. A huge reason for the expansion of European empires was economic rivalries since it motivated them to gain more natural resources from their colonies and because they could tax these colonies to increase their economy.

Economic rivalries led to the expansion of European empires since they realized that they could exploit their colonies for money. Many European colonies had raw materials and valuable natural resources which interested many European empires. Events such as the Scramble for Africa was caused by this since many African nations had a lot of valuable resources such as gold and diamonds that the Europeans wanted. So, Europeans colonized Africa to extract those resources that they wanted access to so that they could sell them and trade them which led to their economies growing and the African economies were left suffering. Another example was the British colonizing India to exploit their resources and their people. The British colonized India since they could use their people as cheap labor so that they didn't have to pay workers high salaries. This led to their economy increasing since they barely had to pay their workers.

Another reason economic rivalries led to the expansion of European empires was because they could tax them to get more money. Taxation was a huge motivation for European empires to start expanding since they saw it as a chance to gain more money. An example of this would be the British taxing the Americas since they wanted more money in their economies. They were taxing the Americas due to them losing money after investing a lot of their money in a war, but it led to a revolution against their colony. Another example would be the Dutch colonizing Indonesia to tax them. The Dutch had a joint stock company called the Dutch East Indies Company, which exploited the people of Indonesia as they were taxed by the company so that the people that had stock in the company wouldn't lose their money.

In the period circa 1450-1750, economic rivalries were the primary motivation for the expansion of European empires due to religious conflicts, developed labor systems and new discovery of land. During this time period, the Columbian Exchange was occurring. The Columbian Exchange was the trafficking of diseases, foods, and animals from the Old World (Europe) to the New World (the Americas). This exchange led to the syncretism of many ideas and was beneficial for both areas.

Religious conflicts like the Protestant Reformation and Shi'a and Sunni beliefs were the result of expansion of European empires. The Protestant Reformation, created by Martin Luther, was the separation of many individuals from the Roman Catholic Church. Many were tired of the Roman Catholic Church's ideals and believed that separation would be more beneficial than continuing forward. The Shi'a (the Safavid) and the Sunni (the Mughal) were both in constant war with each other due to their different beliefs. This belief consisted of who was the successor of Mohammed. This constant dispute led to consequences for both, meaning no one wanted to trade because they did not want to get caught in the crossfire.

Developed labor systems such as the Mit'a System and the Encomienda System were the result of expansion of European empires. The Mit'a system was originally created by the Incas but soon taken over by the Spanish. The Incas way of using the Mit'a system was a mandatory public service project for many to improve the community for everyone. The Spanish way of using the Mita's

Long Essay Question 3

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses* on [AP Central](#).

Sample: 3A

Thesis Score: 1

Contextualization Score: 1

Evidence Score: 2

Analysis and Reasoning Score: 2

Total Score: 6

Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for thesis by providing a historically defensible claim and a line of reasoning regarding the extent to which economic motives were the primary motivation for European imperial expansion. The thesis, found in the first paragraph, states that “While economic motives including new economic ideals as well as drive for domination over certain trade motivated the expansion of European empires, missionary values on the spread on religion also pushed for the European expansion from the period 1450 to 1750.”

Contextualization (0–1 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for contextualization in the first paragraph, by situating European imperial expansion in the context of long standing contacts between Europe and Asia, through which “Islamic and Chinese inventions had made their way through trade to Europe, giving them access to advanced navigation systems and ship building.”

Evidence (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for using evidence. In the second paragraph, the response provides multiple pieces of relevant evidence, including Europeans seeking cheaper spices from Asia and finding a direct maritime route to Asia, Portugal’s Prince Henry and “Vasco de Gama” as key figures in early European imperial expansion, economic competition between the Portuguese and Dutch, the Dutch using flyuts to dominate the Indian Ocean trade, mercantilism, and the trade in American silver. In the third paragraph, the response identifies further pieces of evidence, including religious changes in Europe due to the Protestant Reformation, the activities of Christian missionaries in Asia, and the suppression of Christian missionary activities in Japan under the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Long Essay Question 3 (continued)

The response earned 1 point for supporting an argument with evidence. In the second paragraph, the response makes the argument that economic rivalries played a “huge” part in motivating European imperial expansion and supports that argument with the evidence of European competition to find maritime routes to South and East Asia in order to control the spice trade. In the third paragraph, an argument that a desire to spread Christianity was an important motive behind European expansion is supported by the evidence of Christian missionary activities in Tokugawa Japan. Also in the second paragraph, the response makes the argument that Portugal’s early lead in overseas exploration and expansion led to economic conflicts (supported by the evidence of the Portuguese-Dutch rivalry in the Indian Ocean) and the argument that European countries were engaged in a “global economic conflict regarding who was going to gain the most wealth in the world” (supported by the evidence of mercantilism). In the third paragraph, the response makes the argument that missionary activities constituted a “European motivation for expansion during this period that had no regard to the economy,” and supports that argument with the evidence of Christian missionary activities in Japan.

Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 2

The response earned 1 point for historical reasoning. The response consistently uses historical reasoning to frame and structure the arguments that are being developed. In particular, in the second paragraph, the response uses the reasoning process of causation to explain the various economic motivations that led European countries to pursue imperial expansion. In the third paragraph the response uses the reasoning process of comparison to argue that religious motivations played a significant but different role in leading Europeans to pursue imperial expansion compared to economic motivations.

The response earned 1 point for complex understanding. The response develops a complex and nuanced argument that evaluates the relative importance of economic factors and non-economic (religious) factors as motivations for European overseas expansion. The response also provides multiple pieces of relevant evidence in support of both sides of its argument.

Long Essay Question 3 (continued)**Sample: 3B****Thesis Score: 1****Contextualization Score: 0****Evidence Score: 1****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 1****Total Score: 3****Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for thesis by providing a historically defensible claim and a line of reasoning regarding the extent to which economic motives were the primary motivation for European imperial expansion. The thesis, which can be found in the first paragraph, states that “A huge reason for the expansion of European empires was economic rivalries since it motivated them to gain more natural resources from their colonies and because they could tax these colonies to increase their economy.”

Contextualization (0–1 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for contextualization. In the first paragraph, the response attempts to situate the topic of the prompt in a broader context, but the statement that “European states like Spain were exploring different continents and setting up colonies in places like Africa” is too vague a reference and includes information outside the time period.

Evidence (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for using evidence. In the second paragraph, the response notes that European colonies could “exploit their colonies for money ... raw materials and valuable natural resources” and that the “British colonized India” to use “people as cheap labor.” In the third paragraph, there is additional evidence, stating that “The Dutch had a joint stock company ... which exploited the people.”

The response did not earn the point for supporting an argument with evidence. There is an attempt to use evidence to support an argument in the second paragraph, but the argument concerns the Scramble for Africa, which is outside the time period. In the third paragraph, the response notes that the Dutch colonized Indonesia to tax people there, but this statement is not tied to an argument about economic rivalries.

Analysis and Reasoning (0–2 points): 1

The response earned 1 point for historical reasoning. The response uses the historical reasoning process of causation to frame and structure the argument that is being developed regarding economic exploitation of the colonies and extraction of natural resources.

The response did not earn the point for complex understanding. There is no attempt to develop a complex or nuanced argument or to demonstrate a complex understanding through sophisticated analysis and/or effective use of evidence.

Long Essay Question 3 (continued)**Sample: 3C****Thesis Score: 1****Contextualization Score: 0****Evidence Score: 0****Analysis and Reasoning Score: 0****Total Score: 1****Thesis/Claim (0–1 points): 1**

The response earned 1 point for thesis by providing a historically defensible claim and a line of reasoning regarding the extent to which economic motives were the primary motivation for European imperial expansion. The thesis, which can be found in the first sentence of the response, states that “economic rivalries were the primary motivation for the expansion of European empires due to religious conflicts, developed labor systems and new discovery of land.” Although the line of reasoning is this statement is not clearly articulated, the development of labor systems and discoveries of new lands was deemed sufficient to earn the point. The reference to “religious conflicts” does not match the claim that economic rivalries were the primary motivation for imperial expansion, and was treated as a read-through error.

Contextualization (0–1 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for contextualization. In the second sentence of the first paragraph, there is an attempt to situate the topic of the prompt in a broader historical context, with the reference to the Columbian Exchange, but the statement is vague and does not directly relate to the prompt.

Evidence (0–2 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for using evidence. The second paragraph contains references to the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, and Protestants’ discontent with the Catholic Church. This is followed by references to the Sunni-Shi’a split in Islam, identifying the Safavids as Shi’a and the Mughals as Sunni, outlining the reasons for the Sunni-Shi’a schism, and mentioning conflicts between the two sides. Although the evidence that the response provides is accurate, it does not directly relate to the prompt. The third paragraph contains references to the Mit’a and Encomienda systems in the Americas. The statement that “The Mit’a system was originally created by the Incas but soon taken over by the Spanish” was credited toward the Using Evidence point, but the point was not earned as the response does not provide a second piece of accurate evidence relevant to the prompt.

The response did not earn the point for supporting an argument with evidence. The evidence provided in the second paragraph is off-topic and is not used to support an argument about the prompt. In the third paragraph the response makes the argument that the development of “labor systems ... was the result of expansion of European empires” and supports it with the evidence of the Spanish adopting the Mit’a system, but this was not enough to earn the point. The Encomienda system is merely mentioned and is not used to support the argument.

Long Essay Question 3 (continued)

Analysis and Reasoning: (0–2 points): 0

The response did not earn the point for historical reasoning. The response does not use comparison, causation, or continuity and change over time to frame or structure an argument.

The response did not earn the point for complex understanding. There is no attempt to develop a complex or nuanced argument or to demonstrate a complex understanding through sophisticated analysis and/or effective use of evidence.